

Series of Flu Symposiums Target Specific Groups

KDHE partnered with the Kansas Division of Emergency Management and several other state agencies to conduct a series of pandemic flu symposiums across the state in May and June. The symposiums targeted various segments of society that would be affected if pandemic flu strikes in Kansas.

The first symposium, which concentrated on avian flu in game birds and domestic fowl, was held May 9 in Great Bend, near Cheyenne Bottoms, a wetland area that could be visited by infected wild waterfowl. Speakers included: Paul Grosdidier, DVM, Kansas Animal Health Department; Gail Hansen, DVM, MPH, State Epidemiologist; and Helen Hands, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

Faith-based and community/advocacy organizations were invited to the second symposium held May 15 in Topeka. Because these organizations often meet the daily needs of people, they will become crucial partners in assisting a community during a flu pandemic. Dr. John Wisner MD, KU School of Medicine - Wichita; Dr. Howard Rodenberg, MD, MPH, State Health Officer and Helen Stucky Risdon, United Methodist Church Parish Nurse, spoke on how churches and other community-based groups and organizations will play a vital role in meeting the needs of community residents during a flu pandemic.

The third symposium, also held May 15 in Topeka, targeted government and public safety officials. Local officials, who will have a crucial role in maintaining critical infrastructure during pandemic influenza in Kansas, heard from Dr. Rodenberg along with Dan Swearingen, state of Kansas Information Services and Dan Robeson, Johnson County Emergency Management about the importance of planning for a pandemic.

Healthcare was the targeted group at a symposium held May 22 in Salina. This symposium provided a discussion of expectations and realities that healthcare can expect to face in the period leading up to and during the time when an influenza pandemic occurs. Local health departments, hospitals, primary care physicians, nursing homes, and home health services learned what their distinct roles would be in preparing for and responding to pandemic influenza in Kansas. Dr. Carolyn Synovitz, MD, KU School of Medicine – Wichita joined Dr. Rodenberg as a presenter at this symposium.

Wichita hosted the last symposium June 23. Business and industry officials learned that it is estimated that a third to half of the workforce in Kansas could be affected by pandemic influenza or off work for weeks at a time if government officials were to effectively shut down commercial operations as a part of pandemic influenza community containment efforts.

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The symposium provided examples of how to plan to keep a business going during a pandemic, including what role a business/industry might have during a pandemic and what role it might play in minimizing the impact locally. Dr. Rodenberg spoke again on the basics of pandemic flu and was joined by Mike Doble, Raytheon Corporation and Terry Bieberly, TelCove of Wichita.

“A lot of hard work by KDHE staff went into planning and conducting the Pandemic Flu Symposiums,” said Rodenberg. “There was also excellent cooperation with our partner agencies, and we were very pleased with the level of attendance by the targeted groups.”

A final symposium targeting schools is still in the planning stages.